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ABSTRACT

The major part of this report of the Intergovernmental Conference on Scientific and Technical Information (UNISIST II), held in Paris May 28-June 1, 1979, focuses on three sets of recommendations which were unanimously approved after combining the recommendations proposed by various groups and blocs: (1) recommendations to the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD), (2) recommendations to Unesco, and (3) recommendations to member states. In addition, the report summarizes the conference's major issues of concern, provides a brief description of conference activities, discusses the "politicization" of the conference, describes U.S. participation, and presents a short historical background of UNISIST, including its policies, plans, norms, and standards. (JD)

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UNISIST II:
Special Report

Lowell H. Hattery, Editor
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JUNE 1979

Lowell H. Hattery, Editor

VOL. 15, NO. 1

UNISIST II

SPECIAL REPORT

Our correspondent reports in detail the proceedings and actions of the Intergovernmental Conference on Scientific and Technical Information for Development—UNISIST II, held in Paris 28 May - 1 June.

Because of its importance throughout the information world we devote this issue of *IRLA* to UNISIST II.

UNISIST's gradual shift in emphasis since its inception in 1971 from system compatibility and standardization to STI (Scientific and Technical Information) for developing countries was consolidated at the program's second Intergovernmental Conference in Paris May 28 to June 1.

The Conference reflected the new assertiveness of the UN's developing countries in defining their own needs and in demanding correction of imbalances between developed and developing countries as part of the New International Economic Order (nieo).

Also contributing to the emphasis on developing countries was UNISIST's role as standard bearer for Unesco at the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) in August, and the threat of the establishment of a new UN agency for STI for development.

UNCSTD Secretary-General Joao Frank da Costa spoke at the opening session about the emergence of a "new broader conception of development" which is total, original, self-determined and endogenous.

Against this background some of the issues of major concern were: user orientation, repackaging of information, development of information infrastructures, training and education, the availability of documents and access to information.

Consensus on the issues was not easily achieved. The conference threatened to split apart between developed and developing countries, but the desire for unity behind proposals to UNCSTD provided a compelling force for compromise. In the end three comprehensive sets of recommendations--addressed to UNCSTD, Unesco and UNISIST member states--were unanimously approved.

Underlying the debate was the acute awareness of third world delegates to the importance of information resources in the new international economic order and the feeling of many that, for reasons of national and commercial interest, both East and West are holding back information important for development.

Delegates from industrialized countries, in battling what some viewed as an attempted raid on their stores, saw the "Group of 77" non-aligned countries as contentious. Many felt the developing countries were expecting too much too fast without taking into account the difficulty of technical and economic as well as social, political and administrative problems involved.

Although a consensus was finally reached, many of the delegates from both North and South were unhappy about the "politicization" of the conference. While much time was spent in committee haggling over terminology and references to controversial UN resolutions, little attention was given to concrete and operational matters. Even in the formal statements of member states, suggestions for UNISIST action were general and repetitious. And with plenary sessions morning and afternoon every day but one, there was limited opportunity for informal exchanges between delegates.

The consternation was greatest among the information specialists, who often felt lost in the welter of diplomatic language and procedures, and least among veterans of recent UN conferences. A general policy meeting, especially in the current UN climate, could not avoid political divisions, Mme. N. Dusoulier of the Interorganizational Board for Information Systems (IBO), observed. It was not so bad, she said, in comparison with other recent meetings.

Jacques Tocatlian, director of the Unesco General Information Program (GIP), which includes responsibility for UNISIST, said later that he thought the results of the meeting were "quite positive."

"All the difficulties were ironed out," he said. "There was a willingness to compromise and remove political statements, to stand behind a united front."

A conference of 90 governments, he said, "is not where one solves particular technical problems. It is to give direction for the future. The resolutions will outline the program for many years to come."

Important for UNCSTD, Tocatlian feels, is UNISIST's explanation of requirements for a world information network as proposed in one of the UNCSTD papers. UNISIST II, he said, has "passed on the message that national infrastructures are prerequisite for a national network." This may seem obvious to technicians, he said, but is useful for the politicians at UNCSTD.

One issue on which the meeting had no trouble agreeing was opposition to the formation of a separate UN agency to deal with STI for development. While

support for the new body comes from not easily identifiable quarters in the UN bureaucracy, opposition was implicit in the formal presentations of many of the delegations as they warned against the proliferation of agencies and the duplication of effort. In defending UNISIST against encroachment, the delegations gave strong support to the program's overall activities, achievements and goals.

UNCSTD Secretary-General da Costa said he thought it was "a good conference. But there is a diversion of views between developed and developing countries on obstacles to access, whether governmental or private. It is a problem," he said, "which will continue to appear."

---Maxine Hattery---
London

UNISIST RECOMMENDS--

Combining eleven sets of recommendations proposed by various groups and blocs including the conference steering committee, UNISIST II arrived at unanimous approval of a set of recommendations for UNCSTD, Unesco and UNISIST member states.

UNISIST II to UNCSTD:

UNISIST II recommends that the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) pay special attention to the following:

- (a) scientific and technological information is a national and international resource; the progress of science and technology depends to a large extent upon access to and effective utilization of this resource; and together with economic, social and cultural information, it constitutes a major factor for accelerating the development process;
- (b) all countries have the same right to full access to the resources of scientific and technological information that are published or could readily be published and need the necessary means to adapt, utilize and absorb this information to serve their development;
- (c) all countries should elaborate national scientific and technological information policies and plans, as an essential and inseparable part of national policies for scientific, technical, cultural, economic and social development, to stimulate and harmonize the setting up of national information systems and/or networks;
- (d) national information systems and networks need for their development trained specialized manpower; infrastructures including communication facilities, data banks, libraries, documentation centres, archives, back-up literature, hardware and software; and the necessary information-handling procedures and techniques, tools, methods, norms and standards;
- (e) national information systems and networks should aim to ensure access to, and facilitate utilization of, scientific and technological information from national and international sources in order to stimulate endogenous development and national capacity for innovation and to support the assessment, transfer and adaptation of technology;

- (f) given that national and international information services and systems develop in a compatible fashion, it will be technically feasible to establish, gradually and stepwise, flexible, cooperative international networks of information systems and services for the exchange of scientific and technological information;
- (g) the establishment of these networks will necessitate substantial resources and will need to be sustained by a continuous effort of goodwill and collaboration among nations, and international systems.
- (h) the creation, maintenance, and development of national information infrastructures in developing countries necessitate large financial assistance without which it would be impossible to achieve these objectives in a satisfactory manner.
- (i) UNISIST, as an existing, unique and dynamic programme, should play a central role in the new activities relating to scientific and technological information, with due support from Unesco's closely related sectors covering the natural and social sciences, education and communication.
- (j) Unesco, through the UNISIST programme, and collaborating very closely with its member states, with the organizations of the United Nations system, in which its programme occupies a special position, and with other intergovernmental and international nongovernmental organizations, has been the lead United Nations Agency to work towards the establishment of an internationally flexible network of information systems and services based on voluntary co-operation;
- (k) the recommendations of the UNISIST II Conference, having taken into full account the objectives of UNCSTD, have set the basis for further strengthening the relevance of UNISIST, and Unesco's future action in general, to the goals of national socio-economic development and the establishment of the new international economic order;

Therefore recommends to the UNCSTD, when elaborating guidelines for future action to be undertaken by the United Nations organizations on scientific and technical information, should take full advantage of the considerable experience accumulated primarily by Unesco through UNISIST and also by other United Nations agencies in operating their respective specialized information systems and services within the conceptual framework of UNISIST and should avoid the creation of new programmes and structures within the United Nations system which could duplicate the work of existing agencies;

Recommends to the Director-General of Unesco that he submit this recommendation and the results of the UNISIST II Conference to the attention of the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD) which will meet in Vienna, Austria, from 20 to 31 August 1979, and to its Preparatory Committee at its fifth session in June.

UNISIST II to Unesco:

1. Recommends to Unesco in order to build on the achievements and progress so far made:

- (a) continued pursuit of the original goal of UNISIST to facilitate the flow and utilization of scientific and technological information as laid down in Unesco's Medium-Term Plan for 1977-1982 and to create the necessary conditions to develop with appropriate speed a flexible world co-operation of information systems, networks and services, including economic social and cultural aspects of information, to ensure maximum effectiveness in all fields of development;
- (b) further improvement of UNISIST as a conceptual framework for information systems and services development in all subject fields including the social sciences at the national, regional and international levels;
- (c) continued priority in the UNISIST framework for actions directed to the development of infrastructures and training and education of information personnel and users, and the special importance attached to activities for the promotion of information policies and the promotion and dissemination of methods, norms and standards as prerequisites for a coherent programme;

2. Recognizes the need to make necessary adjustments to Unesco's programme in order to contribute better to the advance of science and technology and their application to development;

3. Recommends therefore that Unesco in its future information programme:

- (a) continue to implement the UNISIST programme, as laid down in resolution 20 C/5/10.1/1, but strengthening a user-orientated strategy, taking into account the needs of all potential users, such as scientific and technical communities, development planners, educators, professionals, technicians, local workers as well as others who participate in the process of development;
- (b) assist member states especially developing countries, at their request, to formulate and implement information policies and plans;
- (c) encourage bilateral and multilateral co-operative arrangements for the sharing of experience, resources, facilities and expertise among member states at various levels of development;
- (d) assist in the strengthening of the role of national focal points and UNISIST national committees and revise the present guidelines in the light of the recognized role of information in development;
- (e) assist in the creation and strengthening of national regional and international information systems, and encourage and facilitate the participation of developing countries in the international systems;

- (f) promote policies which ensure that information networks do not merely facilitate the flow of information but also encourage creativity, capacity for innovation, maximum utilization of local resources of information, and stimulate the will to gain knowledge, and to establish centres of documentation on technologies of local origin;
- (g) sponsor studies aimed at identifying precisely the obstacles to unimpeded flow of information and exploring possible ways of overcoming them;
- (h) assist member states, on request, with determining their information needs, and strengthening of infrastructures by joint effort of information, library and archives services including the use of specialized equipment to meet these needs;
- (i) improve provision of primary documents in developing countries, bearing in mind among other things, the possibility of creating central documentation stores for libraries at the regional, subregional or national levels;
- (j) assist member states, in setting up national or regional data and information analysis centres and information institutions providing a wide range of users with services tailored to meet their special needs for evaluated, consolidated and repackaged information, data, and documentation;
- (k) encourage the creation and strengthening of international, regional, subregional and national referral services, in order to collect and disseminate information on the world sources of information;
- (l) initiate specific projects to facilitate the selection, use, and adaptation of advanced information and communication technologies by member states, as appropriate, to gain access to international sources of information and to develop effective systems and networks;
- (m) investigate and establish, if practicable, a possible coupon system which would enable developing countries to gain access under the best possible terms to international information systems and networks;
- (n) promote the provision of advisory services to users such as decision-makers, extension workers or the general public on all aspects of information handling and use including policies and technologies;
- (o) continue, in close co-operation with non-governmental organizations, to draw up norms, standards and guiding principles for information handling in general and for the operation of compatible information systems in particular;
- (p) give support to terminological activities at national and international levels, since terminology is fundamental to the indexing and retrieving of information as well as to the transfer of knowledge into different languages;

- (q) promote skill in use of information among all kinds of potential users, including technologists and scientists, especially in the use of on-line information systems, and for this purpose develop syllabi, training packages and guidelines;
 - (r) intensify efforts in training and education of personnel at all levels, including extension officers and information specialists requiring language skills, and take appropriate action to help member states enhance the image and status of the information profession;
 - (s) strengthen UNISIST's current role in catalysing and harmonizing the design and development of information systems and services of the United Nations system;
 - (t) co-operate more closely with other Specialized United Nations Agencies, particularly in the field of patents and industrial information, in order to fulfill the overall objectives of UNISIST;
 - (u) pursue the joint IOB/UNISIST programme to enhance the use and application of UNISIST guidelines and standards within the United Nations system;
 - (v) provide on request for the evaluation of international information systems and programmes;
 - (w) undertake action with a view to mobilizing increased funds through UNDP and other international and bilateral agencies and other sources, for assisting developing countries to develop information systems;
 - (x) study the best way of relating existing Unesco sectoral information activities to the General Information Programme;
 - (y) convene every five to seven years, an intergovernmental conference on problems of the development of scientific and technical information;
4. Recommends to the Director-General that he submit to the next General Conference of Unesco, within the Draft Programme and Budget for 1981-1983, and on the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Council of the General Information Programme priority proposals based on the issues raised in Part C of the main working document taking into account the debate of the Conference and as confirmed in this recommendation.

UNISIST II to Member States:

Recommends to Unesco member states that they consider to:

1. Support, and actively participate in, the implementation of Unesco's UNISIST programme;
2. Participate in international, regional and subregional co-operative information programmes especially among developing countries, in order to promote the development of scientific and technological information and its better application and adaptation to development objectives;

3. On the basis of a thorough study of the role of scientific and technological achievements in reaching development objectives, elaborate and implement a national policy for utilization of scientific and technological information, based on the principles of UNISIST, and establish a national organizational focus for acquiring and utilizing information for development;
4. Give the necessary attention to the economic, social and cultural aspects of information, attaching particular importance to the extension of the principles of UNISIST to the social sciences;
5. Organize and co-ordinate national information resources in order to serve national development needs more effectively, as well as to contribute to the solution of global development problems;
6. Set up national and regional data and information analysis centres for the purpose of collecting, evaluating, processing and making effective use of domestic and foreign data in the field of science and technology;
7. Facilitate the use by developing countries under the most favorable conditions of information or data transmission services that may exist;
8. Take action to remove obstacles to information flow, particularly by promoting greater freedom of access to governmental and private sources of scientific and technological information and by making information available, as needed, in its national language(s);
9. Reinforce national co-ordinating machinery for the provision of advice on information management to governmental organizations and information services;
10. Facilitate interaction among information specialists, the scientific and technological communities, all industrial and agricultural sectors, development specialists and planners, in order to apply information in meeting national needs;
11. Assign high priority to the users' training programmes and to development of specialized manpower resources, trained in skills which include the understanding of development priorities, the location of information resources relevant to them, and the selection, repackaging, and application of information, wherever generated, to national development purposes.

POLITICIZATION

"Politization" was a frequent epithet heard in the lobby between Salle I of UNISIST's highly rhetorical plenary sessions and Salle VI where compromise was reached only after late-hour committee meetings.

In the end the only item of major public contention before the recommendations were passed unanimously was reference to STI as the "common heritage of mankind" (according to Australia, first used in the law of the sea conference and causing trouble ever since).

Head of the U.S. delegation Melvin Day objected to the phrase. "The U.S. has consistently opposed such terminology in this context," he told the conference.

Italian delegation chief, Unesco Ambassador M. Ludovic Carducci-Artensio, warned that the conference would "risk consensus on the whole of its recommendation to Unesco" if the terminology were maintained.

In support of the phrase was Unesco Director-General Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, who sat in on the last afternoon's session. Limiting the UN term "universal heritage" to works of art, he said, does not reflect real life.

"Scientists," he said, "have always considered science to be universal." Those who have the edge in making use of STI, he said, should not consider it theirs and theirs alone.

"It's a political choice, but it must be clear," he said.

Carducci-Artensio concurred with the Director-General's sentiments, but insisted that the words constituted an "unfortunately precise and specific phrase with unpleasant connotations within the UN."

Consideration of the knotty paragraph was postponed and picked up at the end of the recommendation. After a five minute recess for last-minute negotiations, Canada proposed "great asset of mankind."

After some tossing around of possible substitutes with acceptable translations in French and Spanish, "common asset" was finally approved. The French delegation accepted "common," saying that "heritage" was the offending word and adding that it was the phrase, not the idea which had been unacceptable.

"Common heritage" was the last bit of controversial Group-of-77 phraseology to be neutered. The rest was rendered in committee. Though compromise involved some long, hard sessions, U.S. delegation Chief Day said the Group's representatives had been very cooperative and willing to make concessions.

The storm centered around Draft Recommendation 8 submitted by Algeria, India and Tunisia on behalf of the Group of 77 bloc of non-aligned nations. The document prefaced a declaration of principles with reference to several UN resolutions which the U.S. delegation to the UN has refused to support.

In the final compromise the controversial resolutions, including 3201 and 3202 on the "new international economic order," 33/115 B on "a new world order for information and communication," and Unesco 4/9-4/2 on "an end to the dependence of the developing world in the field of information and communication" were substituted in the recommendation to UNCSTD with the generally acceptable resolutions 3362, 3507 and 1902 on economic cooperation and technology transfer.

The Group's principles themselves included strong language. The declaration called for "unrestricted circulation" of information and "the right of access for individuals and peoples to the sources of information" as "one of the indissociable components of human rights."

The final recommendations ask member states to "take action to remove obstacles to information flow" and Unesco is asked to "sponsor studies aimed at identifying precisely the obstacles to unimpeded flow of information and exploring the ways of overcoming them." To UNCSTD the conference reports that "all countries have the same right to full access."

The 1971 formulation of "access to information" became in 1979 "access to published information together with that which can readily be published."

Escaping further modifiers, though, was "promoting greater freedom of access to governmental and private sources." The phrase remained as drafted in the recommendation to member states after Holland's proposed insertion of "as far as possible" before "private sources" was balanced by Zambia's proposed addition of the same words to "governmental sources." It was decided that governments and private organizations could decide for themselves how much more freedom was possible, and both amendments were dropped.

Somewhat overshadowed by the access controversy was the question of one future world system versus many compatible ones. The West won, though only by two votes, with "an international network" ejected for the substitute: "flexible cooperative international networks of information systems."

U.S. AT UNISIST II

The U.S. delegation to UNISIST II called for "program focus, concentration, consolidation and realism." Unesco should "focus its program efforts on those activities which Unesco is uniquely qualified to do and where chances of success are most probable."

"The major contribution of the UNISIST program," delegation Head Melvin Day said in his statement to the conference, "is in strengthening the capability of member nations to take advantage of the vast resources of scientific and technological information available at the global level in both developing and developed countries."

Selecting information from this reservoir and being able to put it to use is the main problem facing both developing and developed countries, Day said.

At UNCSTD, Day said, Unesco should stress the role of the member states as the "keystone to global efforts to most effectively use scientific and technical information in national development."

In addition the U.S. proposed greater emphasis on regional information exchange and cooperation and the development of regional infrastructures. More support should be given to intersectoral programs, and Unesco should include elements from the General Information Program and other major sectors in the development of broad programs.

The U.S. cooperated closely with other Western nations in opposing the Group of 77 "declaration of principles" which included statements and references to resolutions which the U.S. has opposed in the UN. The members of the delegation were upset by the politicizing of what they said should have been a technical conference. However, after the last session and passage of the three conference recommendations, Day said the Group had been very cooperative in working out a final compromise.

Members of the U.S. delegation, formed too late for effective participation in the advance planning were:

Melvin S. Day
Director, National Technical Information Service, Department of Commerce
(Representative)

Lee G. Burchinal
Senior Program Associate, Division of International Programs,
National Science Foundation
(Alternate Representative)

Lida Allen
Director, Office of Development, Information and Utilization
Agency for International Development
(Advisor)

Charles Bourne
Staff Scientist, Lockheed Information Systems, Inc.
(Private Sector Advisor)

Judith Werdel
Professional Associate, International Scientific and Technical Information
Programs, National Academy of Sciences
(Private Sector Advisor)

UNISIST BACKGROUND

UNISIST's first intergovernmental conference was held in 1971 after a three-year feasibility study by Unesco and the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU).

The goals established for UNISIST at its inception were:

- to advance and coordinate the world trends toward information sharing and cooperative agreements among governments, international organizations and operating information services;
- to provide guidance and catalytic action for the necessary developments in the field of scientific and technical information;
- to facilitate the access of scientists, engineers and technologists to published information;
- to help the developing countries meet their needs for scientific and technical information;
- to take the necessary measures for the establishment of a flexible world network of information systems and services based on voluntary cooperation.

In 1976, UNISIST and the International Information System on Research in Documentation (ISORID) were both put under Unesco's new General Information Program under the responsibility of the Assistant Director-General for Studies and Programming.

UNISIST and the General Information Program are now operating under the Medium-Term Plan for 1977-1982 of Unesco which includes "development and promotion of information systems and services at the national, regional and international levels." Toward this objective, activities have been divided into five "themes:"

- promotion of the formulation of information policies and plans (national, regional and international);
- promotion and dissemination of methods, norms and standards for information handling;
- contribution to the development of information infrastructures;
- contribution to the development of specialized information systems in the fields of education, culture and communication, and the natural and social sciences;
- promotion of the training and education of specialists in and users of information.

Policies and Plans

For the promotion of information policies Unesco proposed the establishment of "national focal points," now in existence in 54 member states, to coordinate the formulation of national policy and planning. At the same time national committees were to be set up, now numbering 46, to coordinate with UNISIST.

In its introduction, the "Main Working Document" prepared for UNISIST II delegates, outlines some of the difficulties in the effective operation of these centers: "location in the governmental structure, the low priority and support sometimes given to information service development, the existence of strong sectoral information interests, and confusion generated by the establishment of multiple 'focal points' for participation in various international systems."

UNISIST issues guidelines on the formulation of national policy, though the working document suggests that their use "may have been reduced by inadequate awareness by potential users, and insufficient relevance to the broader aspects of national development planning."

Norms and Standards

In promoting the establishment of norms and standards, much of UNISIST's work has been done through working groups on: language problems, bibliographic descriptions, communication formats, bibliographic data interchange, the International Serials Data System and systems interconnection.

To help in coordinating developments in aspects of information transfer, centers have been set up in member states including: the International Information Center for Terminology (Infoterm) in Vienna; the IINTE Clearing House at the Warsaw Institute for Scientific, Technical and Economic Information for thesauri and classification schemes; UNISIST International Center for Bibliographic Descriptions (UNIBID) in London.

The International Serials Data System (ISDS) under the UNISIST program in addition to promoting the use of the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) has established a register of serials and works in the retrieval, dissemination and networking of serials information.

In addition to its own projects, UNISIST cooperates with other standards organizations such as ISO, ICSU-AB, FID, and recently IFLA in its Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC) Office.